

Eulogy to John F. Kennedy

by Richard Cardinal Cushing

Delivered on a National Television Mass from Boston, November 24, 1963

IN THE NAME of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, amen.

My dearly beloved, friends in Christ and guests:

A shocked and stricken world stands helpless before the fact of death, that death brought to us through a tragically successful assault upon the life of the President of the United States.

Our earliest disbelief has slowly given way to unprecedented sorrow as millions all over the earth join us in lamenting a silence that can never again be broken and the absence of a smile that can never again be seen.

For those of us who knew the President as friend as well as statesman, words mock our attempts to express the anguish of our hearts.

It was my privilege to have been associated with John F. Kennedy from the earliest days of his public life, and even prior to that time, my privilege to have watched him mature with ever-expanding responsibility, to have known some of the warmth of his hearty friendship, to see tested under pain and loss the steely strength of his character.

I have been with him in joy and in sorrow, in decision and in crisis, among friends and with strangers and I know of no one who has combined in more noble perfection the qualities of greatness that marked his cool, calculating intelligence and his big, brave bountiful heart.

Now all of a sudden, he has been taken from us and I dare say we shall never see his like again.

Many there are who will appropriately pay tribute to the President as a world figure, a tribute due him for his skill in political life and his devotion to public service.

Many others will measure the wide interests of his mind, the swiftness of his resolution, the power of his persuasion, the efficiency of his action and the courage of his conviction.

For me, however, it is more fitting and proper to recall him during these days of mourning as husband and father, surrounded by his young and beloved family.

Although the demands of his exalted position carried him often on long journeys and filled even his days at home with endless labors, how often he would make time to share with his little son and sweet daughter whatever time would be his own.

What a precious treasure it is now and will be forever in the memories of two fatherless children? Who among us can forget those childish ways which from time to time enhance the

elegance of the Executive mansion with the touching scenes of a happy family life?

Charming Caroline stealing the publicity, jovial John-John on all four ascending the stairs of an airplane to greet his daddy and a loving mother like all mothers joyfully watching the two children of her flesh and blood, mindful always of three others in the nurseries of the Kingdom of Heaven.

At the side of the President in understanding devotion and affection behold his gracious and beautiful Jacqueline. True always to the obligations of her role as mother, she has given new dimensions to the trying demands of being America's First Lady.

The pride in her husband which he so eminently justified, was plainly reciprocated in his pride of her. The bonds of love that made them one in marriage became like hoops of steel binding them together.

From wherever men may look out from eternity to see the workings of our world, Jack Kennedy must beam with new pride in that valiant woman who shared his life, especially to the moment of its early and bitter end.

It will never be forgotten by her for her clothes are now stained with the blood of her assassinated husband.

These days of sorrow must be difficult for her--more difficult than for any others. A Divine Providence has blessed her as few such women in history by allowing her hero husband to have the dying comfort of her arms.

When men speak of this sad hour in times to come, they will ever recall how well her frail beauty matched in courage the stalwart warrior who was her husband. We who had so many reasons for holding her person in a most profound respect must now find an even wider claim for the nobility of her spirit.

One cannot think, my dearly beloved, especially one such as myself, of the late President without thinking also of the legacy of public service which was bequeathed to him by his name and his family.

For several generations in a variety of tasks, this republic on one level or another has been enriched by the blood that was so wantonly shed on Friday last. Jack Kennedy fulfilled in the highest office available to him the long dedication of his family.

It is a consolation for us all to know that his tragic death does not spell the end of this public service but commits to new responsibilities the energies and the abilities of one of the truly great families of America.

What comfort can I extend to their heavy hearts today--mother, father, sisters, brothers--what beyond the knowledge that they have given history a youthful Lincoln, who in his time and in his sacrifice, had made more sturdy the hopes of this nation and its people.

The late President was even in death, a young man--and he was proud of his youth. We can never forget the words with which he began his short term as President of the United States:

Let the word go forth, he said, from this time and place, to friend and foe alike, that the torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans--born in this century, tempered by war, disciplined by a hard and bitter peace, proud of our ancient heritage ...

No words could describe better the man himself who spoke, one whose youth supplied an almost boundless energy, despite illness and physical handicap, whose record in war touched heroic proportions, whose service in Congress was positive and progressive.

It was against this personal background that he continued by saying:

Let every nation know . . . that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and success of liberty. This much we pledge and more.

All that the young President promised in these words, he delivered before his assassination. He has written in unforgettable language his own epitaph.

Two days ago, he was the leader of the free world, full of youth, vigor and promise, his was a role of action, full of conflict, excitement, pressure and change, his was a fully human life, one in which he lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow, loved and was loved.

Now in the inscrutable ways of God, he has been summoned to an eternal life beyond all striving, where everywhere is peace.

All of us who knew personally and loved Jack Kennedy--his youth, his drive, his ideals, his heart, generosity and his hopes--mourn now more for ourselves and each other than for him.

We will miss him; he only waits for us in another place. He speaks to us today from there in the words of Paul to Timothy:

"As for me, my blood has already flown in sacrifice. I have fought the good fight, I redeemed the pledge; I look forward to the prize that awaits me, the prize I have earned. The Lord whose award never goes amiss will grant it to me--to me, yes, and to all those who have learned to welcome His coming."

John F. Kennedy, 35th President of the United States of America, has fought the good fight for the God-given rights of his fellow man and for a world where peace and freedom shall prevail.

He has finished the race at home and in foreign lands alerting all men to the dangers and the hopes of the future, pledging aid in every form to those who attempted to misinterpret his words, to misunderstand his country, to become discouraged and to abandon themselves to false prophets.

He has fulfilled unto death a privilege he made on the day of his inauguration--a privilege in the form of a pledge--I shall not shrink from my responsibilities.

Far more would he have accomplished for America and the world if it were not for his assassination here in the land that he loved and for which he dedicated and gave his life.

May his noble soul rest in peace. May his memory be perpetuated in our hearts as a symbol of love for God, country and all mankind, the foundation upon which a new world must be built if our civilization is to survive.

Eternal peace grant unto him, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon him.

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, amen.